Without Excuse: Contending Sartre

Abstract

S. C. Sayles's *Without Excuse: Contending Sartre* enters the long and uneasy dialogue between Christian metaphysics and existential humanism. Confronting Jean-Paul Sartre on his own phenomenological ground, Sayles re-examines the existential dictum *existence precedes essence* through the lens of Reformed theology and a Logos-centred metaphysic. Rather than offering a polemical dismissal, Sayles performs a systematic inversion: every ontological "lack" in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is interpreted as evidence of an unacknowledged dependence upon divine authorship.

The study finds that *Without Excuse* accomplishes three intertwined tasks. First, it reconstructs Sartre's philosophical architecture with accuracy and sympathy, tracing his roots in Heidegger and the broader phenomenological tradition. Second, it subjects that architecture to the antithetical critique of Cornelius Van Til, revealing the collapse of autonomy once the Creator–creature distinction is denied. Third, it advances Sayles's original framework of the Information Field (IΔF) and the *Second Shamay* as metaphysical correctives—concepts that relocate human freedom, consciousness, and moral agency within the authored order of the Logos.

This paper argues that *Without Excuse* succeeds not merely as a theological refutation but as a sustained philosophical engagement that reclaims phenomenology for a theocentric ontology. Its tone of "truth against the world" recalls the Reformation's intellectual courage, while its metaphysical imagination extends that tradition into the language of contemporary cosmology and information theory. Sayles's confrontation with Sartre thus becomes emblematic of a wider project: the reconciliation of existential self-awareness with revealed order, freedom with dependence, and consciousness with creation.

Introduction: Sartre, Sayles, and the Question of Freedom

When Jean-Paul Sartre declared that "man is condemned to be free," he gave post-war Europe both a philosophical slogan and an anthropology. Human beings, he argued, are beings-for-themselves—consciousnesses

defined by negation, unanchored in divine or natural essence, forever compelled to invent meaning in an indifferent universe. To many, this diagnosis appeared courageous, even redemptive; after the devastations of total war, autonomy promised dignity. Yet for others, Sartre's anthropology was less a liberation than a lament: freedom without telos, consciousness without Creator, responsibility without ground.

It is at this juncture that *Without Excuse* situates itself. Sayles approaches Sartre not as a mere adversary but as a symptom of modernity's deepest wound—the loss of transcendence. The book belongs to Sayles's *Veritas Contra Mundum* ("Truth Against the World") series, a sequence of philosophical-theological confrontations with the "great philosophers of unbelief." Its declared aim is not accommodation but exposure: to reveal, through internal analysis, how philosophies severed from the Logos implode under the weight of their own premises.

Sayles's method is striking for its restraint. He does not caricature Sartre's system but reconstructs it in detail: its phenomenological lineage in Husserl and Heidegger, its central duality of *être-en-soi* and *être-pour-soi*, its ethic of authenticity, its political extensions in Marxism. Only after this reconstruction does he introduce critique—first from Calvin's doctrine of knowledge before God, then from Van Til's presuppositional antithesis, and finally from his own metaphysical synthesis of the *Information Field* and *Second Shamay*. The result is a work that functions simultaneously as philosophical exegesis, theological disputation, and metaphysical construction.

This paper's purpose is to assess that synthesis. It will examine how Sayles's Logos-centred ontology reframes Sartre's categories of being, nothingness, and freedom; how his integration of Reformed theology challenges existential autonomy; and how his cosmological concepts (IΔF, HSCP, and the *Second Shamay*) attempt to preserve the phenomenological insight of self-awareness while restoring the Creator–creature distinction. The analysis proceeds in six parts:

1. **Sartre's Phenomenology and Its Limits:** an overview of the ontological architecture Sayles engages.
2. **The Reformed Counter-Ontology:** Calvin, Van Til, and the doctrine of dependence.
3. **The Logos-Centred Metaphysic:** Sayles's development of the Information Field as authored reality.
4. **Freedom and the Second Shamay:** re-defining human autonomy as participation rather than negation.

5. **Cultural Genealogy and Legacy:** Sartre's influence on identity politics, therapy culture, and art, as traced in Sayles's text.
6. **Evaluation and Implications:** assessing Sayles's achievement within contemporary philosophical theology.

Throughout, the analysis maintains a neutral academic tone, recognizing *Without Excuse* as both confessional and dialectical: a Christian metaphysics entering conversation, not monologue, with atheistic existentialism. Its guiding question is the one that unites both Sartre and Sayles: what does it mean to be free? For Sartre, freedom is ontological absence; for Sayles, ontological participation. Between these two definitions lies the modern struggle for meaning.

Sartre's Phenomenology and Its Limits

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy cannot be separated from the phenomenological tradition that preceded it. *Without Excuse* rightly begins with this genealogy, positioning Sartre as the radical offspring of Husserl and Heidegger. Sayles traces how Sartre inherits the methodological discipline of intentional description from Edmund Husserl and the existential re-orientation of ontology from Martin Heidegger, only to invert both in an atheistic key.

In *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger had sought to recover the *Seinsfrage*—the question of Being—by analyzing *Dasein*, the being for whom Being is a question. His insight that human existence is "being-in-the-world" undermined the Cartesian dualism of subject and object. Sartre seized upon this framework but amputated its transcendence. For Heidegger, Being remained mysterious, perhaps even sacred; for Sartre, it became mute substance. The movement, as Sayles notes, is from openness to closure, from wonder to defiance. The metaphysical horizon that once pointed toward revelation now terminates in the void.

Sayles's exposition here is both sympathetic and surgical. He acknowledges the descriptive brilliance of phenomenology—its capacity to capture the structures of consciousness without reduction to mechanism—while identifying the fatal presuppositional omission: man has replaced God as the point of reference. The phenomenologist describes appearance; the theologian must ask why appearance appears. For

Sayles, Sartre's refusal to pose that question is not modesty but rebellion, an epistemic gesture with ontological consequences.

Being and Nothingness

At the core of Sartre's system stands the dialectic between *être-en-soi* (being-in-itself) and *être-pour-soi* (being-for-itself). The former is the realm of objects—dense, opaque, self-identical. The latter is consciousness—negation, distance, lack. "Consciousness is not what it is and is what it is not," writes Sartre, capturing in paradox the restlessness of self-awareness. Because consciousness is not coincident with itself, it is free; because it is free, it is condemned.

Sayles reconstructs this ontology with precision before offering critique. For Sartre, consciousness emerges as nothingness within being: the gap that allows reflection and choice. Freedom is thus ontological, not political or moral—it is built into the structure of awareness itself. The tragedy, however, is that this freedom has no telos. The *pour-soi* can negate the *en-soi* endlessly, but it can never become whole. Humanity longs for the impossible unity of fullness and freedom, for what Sartre calls the *ens causa sui*—the self-caused being. In theological language, man longs to be God.

Sayles observes that this longing, when severed from its source, turns pathological. To define being by absence is to enthrone despair. In *Being and Nothingness*, nothingness becomes the condition of possibility for freedom, yet it simultaneously devours meaning. Sartre's metaphysics achieves analytical purity at the cost of existential viability. As Sayles writes elsewhere in the book, phenomenology's brilliance is "diagnosis without cure": it describes the wound but denies the physician.

Consciousness as Negation

Sayles pays careful attention to Sartre's illustrative episodes—the absent friend in the café, the waiter who over-performs his role, the woman who separates body from intention. Each, he concedes, displays Sartre's genius for phenomenological detail: consciousness as a perpetual act of distinction, awareness as the power to introduce absence into presence. Yet each also exposes, for Sayles, the absence of metaphysical foundation.

In the café episode, consciousness creates "the nothing" that reveals absence. For Sartre, this demonstrates that negation is original, not derived. Sayles responds that such a claim requires what it denies: an ontological substrate capable of sustaining negation. The very act of "making nothingness appear" presupposes a ground of intelligibility. Where does this ground come from? For Sayles, from the Logos—the

eternal Word in whom all distinctions subsist. The act of perceiving absence is not the creation of void but the participation of a finite mind in the divine capacity to discriminate being from non-being. Sartre interprets this act as autonomy; Sayles interprets it as reflection of the Author's image.

The Burden of Freedom

Sartre's freedom is relentless: every choice is self-creation, and every refusal is still a choice. The human being is "condemned to be free," responsible for all that he is and for all humanity by extension. Sayles calls this the "weight of divine attributes without divine support." Freedom without grace becomes curse. In Calvin's theology, by contrast, freedom is meaningful only within providence—the liberty of the creature acting within the order of God's decree. Autonomy apart from providence is not power but futility, for it severs action from teleology.

Sayles's critique thus recovers an older distinction: dependence is not bondage, and autonomy is not liberty. Where Sartre defines dignity as self-grounding, Sayles defines it as participation—the freedom of the image within the form of the Creator's will. The inversion is complete: for Sartre, dependence negates freedom; for Sayles, dependence constitutes it.

Phenomenology's Blind Spot

The section concludes with what may be *Without Excuse*'s central hermeneutical claim: phenomenology's greatest insight is also its blindness. By insisting that philosophy must "return to the things themselves," Husserl unintentionally turned the gaze inward, away from the transcendent ground of those things. Heidegger still sensed mystery in Being; Sartre declared that mystery silent. Sayles interprets this progression as the exhaustion of humanism: the descent from wonder to weariness.

Quoting Acts 17:28—"For in him we live, and move, and have our being"—Sayles re-anchors phenomenology in revelation. Consciousness does not float in a void but is sustained moment by moment within the Logos. The movement from *Sein* to *Nichts* is therefore a theological pathology, not a discovery. The phenomenological method, properly redeemed, becomes not a denial of God but a confession of dependence: the careful observation of creation as communication.

Interim Assessment

Read in academic context, Sayles's handling of phenomenology is both rigorous and revisionary. He grants to Sartre his descriptive mastery while refusing his ontological atheism. Rather than dismissing existential

analysis, Sayles integrates it into a wider metaphysic of participation. The method of seeing remains; the metaphysical horizon changes. Freedom remains; its source is re-defined.

In so doing, *Without Excuse* performs what may be called a “Reformed retrieval” of phenomenology—retaining its attentiveness to lived existence while re-anchoring that existence in divine authorship. Sayles does not argue that Sartre was irrational; he argues that Sartre’s rationality lacked its root. The consequence is not merely intellectual error but existential despair. As the next section will show, Sayles turns to the Reformed tradition—especially Calvin and Van Til—to articulate an alternative foundation where freedom, consciousness, and meaning are restored through dependence on the Creator.

The Reformed Counter-Ontology

At the centre of *Without Excuse* lies a conviction inherited from the Reformation: that all intelligibility, being, and freedom are grounded in God’s self-existent reality. Sayles’s engagement with Sartre therefore proceeds by way of contrast between two ontological axioms. Sartre begins with the self—autonomous, self-legislating, defined only by negation. The Reformed tradition begins with the Creator—self-existent (*aseity*), self-revealing, the fountain of all meaning.

For Sayles, these are not merely divergent premises but mutually exclusive worldviews. In the Calvinian framework, to exist is to participate in the divine act of creation and providence; to think is to echo the divine Logos. Human consciousness is derivative, not self-caused. To deny this dependence is to fall, in Cornelius Van Til’s words, into “thought that hangs in the void.” This contrast structures the entire theological counter-ontology that *Without Excuse* unfolds.

Sayles quotes Calvin’s opening line of the *Institutes*: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts—the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” The order is crucial. Knowledge of self without knowledge of God yields distortion; knowledge of God illumines the self. Sartre reverses the order and thereby loses both: his self-knowledge collapses because it lacks the light of its source.

Sayles situates Sartre squarely within what Van Til called the “autonomous principle of interpretation.” The unbelieving mind, Van Til argued, attempts to interpret reality apart from its Creator, yet inevitably borrows the very categories it denies. *Without Excuse* applies this logic to existentialism: Sartre’s demand for coherence, responsibility, and moral seriousness presupposes the transcendent norms he rejects.

Van Til's "borrowed-capital" argument functions in Sayles's hands as a philosophical scalpel. Sartre insists that man is free and responsible for all his acts; yet if being has no ground, responsibility becomes incoherent. The moral "ought" can arise only where there is a Lawgiver. Sartre's claim that choice defines essence is, in Van Tilian terms, a parasitic use of Christian categories—freedom, will, accountability—divorced from their Creator.

Sayles's exposition of Van Til is noteworthy for its clarity. He treats presuppositionalism not as an apologetic tactic but as a metaphysical principle: every system of thought rests upon an ultimate reference point. For Sartre, the ultimate reference point is the self; for Sayles, it is the Logos. Once the self replaces the Logos, ontology loses coherence, epistemology loses truth, and ethics loses obligation. In this sense, Sayles presents Van Til's antithesis not as sectarian polemic but as philosophical necessity: either reality is personal because created by a personal God, or it is impersonal and therefore meaningless.

Sayles's Calvinian framework transforms the question of freedom into a question of providence. Calvin wrote that God "so governs all events that nothing takes place without His will," yet this governance does not extinguish liberty; rather, it secures it. For Sayles, providence is the ontological condition for genuine freedom. The universe is not a closed causal chain but an authored drama in which human acts have meaning precisely because they unfold within divine intentionality.

In Sartre's world, every decision hangs over an abyss; in Sayles's, every decision reverberates within providence. The creature's dependence does not annihilate selfhood but gives it structure. To be free in the Reformed sense is to act within the coherence of creation. Sayles summarises this inversion succinctly: "Freedom severed from providence becomes despair; freedom sustained by providence becomes praise."

No doctrine more clearly demarcates Sayles's position than the Creator–creature distinction. Van Til described it as the "basic ontological difference" without which thought disintegrates. Sartre's project, in contrast, erases the distinction altogether: man becomes his own ground, consciousness the sole source of meaning. *Without Excuse* exposes the consequences of this erasure. If there is no transcendent Creator, then the categories of truth, goodness, and beauty collapse into preference; logic itself becomes contingent, bound to a finite consciousness that cannot justify its own laws of thought.

Sayles’s reading is not polemical but diagnostic. He does not accuse Sartre of moral failure; he analyses an ontological impossibility. “Nothingness,” he observes, “cannot sustain being.” The moment consciousness defines itself as lack, it undermines the stability required for its own negation. The Reformed ontology, by contrast, provides the asymmetrical relation that makes knowledge and morality possible: God is necessary being; man is contingent being. Their relation is covenantal, not competitive.

A recurring motif in *Without Excuse* is Sayles’s redefinition of freedom as *participation* rather than *autonomy*. The biblical image of freedom is not detachment but alignment: the creature acting in harmony with the Creator’s design. “I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts” (Ps. 119:45). In this paradoxical formulation, obedience and liberty coincide. Sayles aligns this with Calvin’s assertion that “the will is most free when it is most the Lord’s.” Sartre’s freedom is centrifugal—driven outward into infinite self-invention; Sayles’s is centripetal—drawn inward toward the Logos, where essence and existence meet.

This participatory model of freedom, Sayles argues, resolves the contradiction that haunts existentialism. Man’s longing to be both finite and infinite is satisfied not by self-creation but by communion. The unity of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, impossible for Sartre, is realised in the Incarnation: in Christ, being and consciousness, fullness and freedom, coincide without contradiction. Here the Reformed soteriology becomes metaphysics. The gospel is not merely moral rescue but ontological restoration: the re-grounding of existence in the Word through whom all things consist.

By grounding ontology in providence, *Without Excuse* also restores moral order. Sartre’s ethics of autonomy—each individual legislating values by choice—inevitably dissolves into relativism. Sayles contrasts this with the covenantal ethics of Scripture, where the moral law reflects the character of God and thus the structure of reality itself. The Ten Commandments, far from restricting freedom, define the boundaries within which freedom flourishes. As Calvin wrote, the law is “not contrary to grace, but the form of life for the redeemed.”

Sayles’s appeal to Van Til reinforces this moral realism. If logic and morality share a common source in the Creator, then ethical norms are not inventions of culture but revelations of order. Sartre’s celebrated “authenticity” becomes, in this light, a truncated echo of sanctification—the call to integrity before God, not before the self. The Logos-centred metaphysic thus transforms the existential demand for authenticity into a theocentric vocation: to be true, not to oneself, but to the truth that sustains the self.

Conclusion

In *Without Excuse*, the Reformed counter-ontology does more than refute Sartre's atheism; it offers a positive alternative worldview in which dependence is dignity and providence is coherence. The contrast may be summarised in three parallel propositions:

	Sartre's Existential Humanism	**Sayles's Reformed Theology**
Ground of Being	Self-existence of consciousness (*pour-soi*).	Divine *aseity*—being of God alone.
Nature of Freedom	Autonomy, self-creation, absence of essence.	Participation in providence; freedom as obedience.
Moral Order	Subjective choice; authenticity without law.	Objective revelation; law as expression of grace.

This comparison captures the hinge of Sayles's project: Sartre's negation becomes evidence of what it denies. The void he describes reveals the absence of the Logos, and thus indirectly testifies to its necessity. In this way, Sayles's Reformed counter-ontology transforms critique into confession. The denial of God, when traced to its logical end, becomes the proof of God's indispensability.

The Logos-Centred Metaphysic

Having established the Reformed counter-ontology that grounds freedom in dependence, *Without Excuse* turns from theological exposition to metaphysical construction. Sayles's argument moves beyond refutation into systematic synthesis, seeking not merely to demonstrate that Sartre's ontology of nothingness fails, but to replace it with an ontology of fullness.

This constructive turn is characteristic of Sayles's wider corpus, where the Logos—the divine Word through whom all things consist—functions as both epistemic and ontological principle. In *Without Excuse*, that principle takes technical shape through two closely related concepts: the **Information Field (IΔF)** and the **Second Shamay**. Together they form what Sayles calls a *Logos-centred metaphysic*: reality as authored information, consciousness as inscription, and freedom as participation in divine authorship.

Where Sartre locates meaning in the self's negation, Sayles locates it in the Logos's affirmation. The contrast is total: nothingness becomes information; negation becomes inscription; autonomy becomes communion. In this way, his metaphysical system operates as both the

philosophical antithesis and the theological completion of existential phenomenology.

Sayles defines the IΔF as the universal informational substrate of creation—the structured field through which all being, consciousness, and relation are sustained. Every particle, perception, and moral act is a coded expression within this field. The analogy is not computational but theological: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made” (Ps. 33:6). Creation is not chaotic flux but articulated speech.

In the Reformed tradition, this claim echoes the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* re-interpreted through informational ontology. Whereas Sartre treats nothingness as ontological condition, Sayles treats it as absence overcome: the world is not born from void but from Word. The IΔF therefore functions as the metaphysical articulation of John 1:3 — “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Information is not impersonal; it is personal utterance.

This model also preserves phenomenology’s descriptive power while correcting its foundation. Consciousness, in Sayles’s account, does not generate meaning ex nihilo; it interprets meaning already inscribed. Human knowing is participation in divine semantics. Thus, where Sartre’s consciousness creates the void by expectation (the absent Pierre), Sayles’s consciousness perceives the informational pattern of presence and absence authored by the Logos. Negation becomes recognition of structure, not creation of nothing.

To situate human experience within this informational cosmos, Sayles introduces the doctrine of the *Second Shamay*—a term drawn from the Hebrew *shamayim* (heavens). In his metaphysical taxonomy, the **First Shamay** corresponds to the material cosmos; the **Second Shamay** to the psychical-informational realm wherein human souls subsist; and the **Third Shamay** to the redeemed order of divine presence.

Within *Without Excuse*, the Second Shamay operates as the metaphysical correction to Sartre’s *pour-soi*. Where Sartre sees consciousness as a self-constituting void, Sayles sees it as a divinely authored habitation. Each soul is uniquely inscribed in the IΔF, possessing identity not through self-creation but through authorship. In this view, consciousness is neither substance nor absence but information—structured, sustained, and morally responsive.

Sayles’s innovation lies in reconciling phenomenological immediacy with theological transcendence. The Second Shamay preserves the inwardness Sartre described while refusing his nihilism. It allows for genuine

subjectivity—the lived stream of perception—without severing it from ontological grounding. Thus, self-awareness is not the spontaneous flicker of a void gazing at itself, but the reflective act of an image returning the gaze of its Maker.

Sayles's metaphysic becomes more intricate in his notion of the **HSCP**, or Hieroglyphic Stream of Conscious Perception. Every act of perception, he proposes, functions as a glyph—an informational imprint within the soul's field. These hieroglyphs record, interpret, and communicate reality across the layers of the IΔF. The metaphor fuses phenomenology, semiotics, and theology: perception is inscription, not projection.

In this model, consciousness is participatory language. The self does not author being; it reads and responds to the Logos's authorship. Where Sartre describes the *pour-soi* as perpetual negation, Sayles describes the soul as continuous translation. Awareness is the interface through which the creature decodes creation's meaning. Freedom, therefore, becomes linguistic—the liberty to interpret truly rather than invent falsely.

Such a conception integrates revelation and cognition. Scripture becomes the highest resolution of the same Logos that underlies all perception; the Word written mirrors the Word embedded in creation. This move re-situates phenomenology within the framework of general and special revelation, transforming what Sartre regarded as contingency into communication.

Sayles aligns this metaphysical architecture with Van Til's Creator–creature distinction. The IΔF supplies a cosmological analogue for that antithesis: the field itself represents the sustaining Word of God, and all created intelligences are dependent inscriptions within it. To posit self-caused consciousness is therefore to deny the informational medium that makes thought possible. Sartre's "nothingness" becomes, in Sayles's idiom, an informational fallacy—an attempt to read without text.

This reframing enables Sayles to preserve the analytical rigor of phenomenology while embedding it in presuppositional theism. Phenomenology describes how consciousness experiences the world; the Logos-centred metaphysic explains why such experience is possible. For Van Til, epistemology depends on revelation; for Sayles, phenomenology depends on inscription. Both reject autonomy as illusion.

The culmination of Sayles's metaphysic is a transformed doctrine of freedom. If all reality is authored information, then freedom cannot mean detachment from authorship; it must mean active correspondence to it. The soul is free not when it creates ex nihilo, but when it resonates

faithfully with the divine Word. Here Sayles unites metaphysics and soteriology: redemption is re-alignment of the soul's informational structure with the Logos.

This participatory model answers Sartre's despair. The longing to be both finite and infinite, to unite *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, is realised not through self-divinisation but through union with Christ. The Incarnation becomes the metaphysical hinge of freedom: the eternal Logos assumes flesh, joining fullness to limitation without contradiction. Thus, what Sartre deemed impossible—the synthesis of necessity and liberty—is achieved in Christological ontology.

From an academic standpoint, Sayles's Logos-centred metaphysic represents a remarkable synthesis of Reformed theology, phenomenology, and information theory. Its originality lies less in any single concept than in its systematic integration. By interpreting the world as informational field and consciousness as authored inscription, Sayles bridges disciplines often regarded as irreconcilable: theology and physics, phenomenology and cosmology, metaphysics and biblical revelation.

Critically, his model remains faithful to Reformed orthodoxy: it affirms *creatio ex nihilo*, divine sovereignty, and human dependence. Yet it also expands these doctrines into the language of contemporary science and philosophy. Where Sartre's ontology collapses into "nothingness," Sayles reconfigures being as encoded meaning—dynamic, relational, and purposive. In academic neutrality, one may note that the system invites both admiration and scrutiny: admiration for its conceptual breadth, scrutiny for the speculative daring with which it translates theological dogma into metaphysical schema.

Nevertheless, *Without Excuse* succeeds in its immediate aim. It demonstrates that a rigorous, biblically grounded metaphysic can meet existentialism on its own field of inquiry and answer it not with mere negation but with greater coherence. The Logos-centred ontology does not silence phenomenology; it completes it. In doing so, Sayles offers a model of how theology might again function as first philosophy in an age dominated by the self's void.

Redefining Human Autonomy

From the opening pages of *Without Excuse*, Sayles identifies freedom as the decisive fault line between the modern and the biblical worldviews. Sartre had made freedom the foundation of anthropology: man is "condemned to be free," responsible for his essence because no divine essence precedes him. Sayles retains the centrality of freedom but reverses its metaphysical direction. In his Logos-centred cosmology,

freedom is not *ex nihilo* invention but the dynamic expression of dependence. It is the liberty of participation, not the autonomy of isolation.

Sayles's argument begins by re-reading Sartre's famous dictum through a theological lens. "Condemned to be free" becomes, in effect, "condemned by freedom"—for when freedom is detached from providence, it becomes burden rather than blessing. The self that must author its own meaning labours under a divine attribute it cannot sustain. To reclaim freedom as gift rather than curse, Sayles situates human agency within the metaphysical structure already articulated by the IΔF and the Second Shamay.

In Sartre's ontology, the *pour-soi* (being-for-itself) is sheer negation, perpetually transcending its facticity but never attaining fullness. Sayles replaces this existential dialectic with a trinitarian hierarchy of created participation. The **First Shamay** grounds physical being; the **Second Shamay** grounds consciousness and moral agency; the **Third Shamay** is the consummated realm of union with Christ. Human freedom, therefore, belongs properly to the Second Shamay—where finite spirits, created in the imago Dei, exercise reflective will within the informational order of the IΔF.

This localisation of freedom is crucial. It acknowledges the phenomenological immediacy of choice while embedding it within ontological dependence. To act freely is to interpret rightly one's position within the Logos-authored field. In this sense, Sayles re-defines autonomy as *responsive resonance*: the soul's attunement to the divine pattern. The will is not a generator of meaning but a receiver and amplifier.

Sayles's metaphysic transforms the structure of Sartrean consciousness. Where Sartre sees the self as lack, Sayles describes it as inscription. The *pour-soi* is not an absence that "nihilates" being but a locus where being is written. Every act of awareness in the Second Shamay is a hieroglyph traced upon the informational field, a correspondence between the created intellect and the Creator's Word. Thus, consciousness is not void but text.

This shift re-imagines freedom as hermeneutic rather than heroic. The moral task is interpretation, not invention. In practical terms, this means that ethical responsibility arises from the accurate reading of divine order. The soul's choices are free precisely because they occur within an intelligible field that invites understanding. Sartre's agent creates meaning out of nothing; Sayles's agent recognises meaning already given. Both are active, but one acts ex nihilo, the other exegetically.

Drawing from Calvin and Van Til, Sayles defines freedom as covenantal rather than absolute. In Reformed theology, the covenant binds the creature to the Creator in mutual correspondence: divine sovereignty establishes human responsibility. Sayles extends this covenantal logic into metaphysics. The informational field functions as covenant medium; the Second Shamay is its moral interface. Within this order, human beings participate in God's creative freedom analogically—free not *from* Him but *in* Him.

This model resolves the paradox of autonomy and dependence that haunted existentialism. For Sartre, divine authorship would annihilate liberty; for Sayles, it secures it. The act of obedience becomes the highest expression of freedom because it aligns the created will with the uncreated Logos. In biblical terms, "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:45). In metaphysical terms, freedom is the self's harmonic resonance with the informational melody of the Word.

The fullest statement of this participatory freedom appears in Sayles's Christology. The Logos who authors the cosmos enters it as man; essence and existence, necessity and freedom, coincide in the Incarnation. Christ therefore embodies the reconciliation that Sartre's metaphysics declared impossible: the unity of fullness (*en-soi*) and transcendence (*pour-soi*). In Christ, the finite does not abolish the infinite; it reveals it.

For Sayles, the believer's union with Christ reconstitutes freedom. Regeneration is not the imposition of divine will upon passive matter but the awakening of the soul within the Second Shamay to its true informational alignment. Salvation is, in this vocabulary, an ontological recalibration—the restoration of the HSCP to coherence with the divine field. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36) becomes a metaphysical as well as soteriological statement: liberation from the chaos of autonomous self-coding into the harmony of Logos-authored being.

Sayles's redefinition of freedom carries direct ethical implications. Sartre's ethic of authenticity demands that each person act as if legislating for all humanity, yet without external moral law. Sayles interprets this as the exhaustion of moral energy in a vacuum. His alternative replaces self-legislation with *Logos-legislation*: the moral law is not imposed heteronomously but revealed as the pattern of being itself.

Hence moral responsibility is intensified, not diminished. Every thought and act becomes an inscription within the IΔF; every decision either harmonises with or distorts the informational order. Sin is therefore informational disorder—a misalignment between the soul's perception and

divine meaning. Redemption, conversely, is restoration of interpretive clarity. This transposition of ethics into metaphysics allows Sayles to preserve Sartre's emphasis on seriousness and responsibility while grounding it in objective order.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, Sayles's anthropology also offers a psychology of reconciliation. Sartre's self is perpetually fractured, divided between what it is and what it is not. Sayles's self is unified by authorship: its multiplicity of perceptions coheres because each is a glyph within a larger narrative. The anxiety of infinite self-creation yields to the peace of interpretation.

This has therapeutic resonance. The modern self, often described in psychological literature as disintegrated by choice overload and identity performance, finds in Sayles's framework an ontological cure: the restoration of meaning through recognition of authorship. Freedom without anchor breeds despair; freedom within the Logos breeds coherence. Thus, Sayles's metaphysic not only counters Sartre but addresses the pathology of modern autonomy itself.

The anthropology that emerges from *Without Excuse* is neither deterministic nor voluntarist, but participatory. Man is free because he is informed; he acts because he is authored. The Second Shamay grounds this freedom in a realm where consciousness is inscription, responsibility is interpretation, and moral life is covenantal resonance.

From a neutral scholarly standpoint, this framework represents a coherent and original attempt to reconcile phenomenological self-awareness with Reformed theism. It transforms the existential vocabulary of angst and authenticity into theological categories of covenant and communication. Whether one accepts its metaphysical realism or not, *Without Excuse* succeeds in demonstrating that a biblically grounded metaphysic can engage Sartre's central question—what is freedom?—without retreating into fideism or sentimentality. Sayles's answer is rigorous: freedom is fullness, not void; participation, not autonomy; the Word, not the self.

Cultural Genealogy and Legacy

One of the most distinctive features of *Without Excuse* is that its author refuses to treat Sartre as a relic of twentieth-century philosophy. Sayles recognises Sartre not merely as a thinker but as a cultural progenitor whose anthropology—*existence precedes essence*—became the unspoken creed of the modern West. His dictum migrated from existential theory into the texture of everyday life, shaping the rhetoric of politics, art, and personal identity.

Sayles maps this genealogy with sociological precision. From *The Second Sex* to post-1960s activism, from the rise of “authenticity” in therapy culture to the curated self of social media, the same anthropological assumption reappears: that the individual is self-defining, that identity is performance, and that meaning is manufactured rather than received. In this way, Sartre becomes, in Sayles’s phrase, “the secular catechist of the modern age.” The book’s cultural chapters—written in aphoristic prose but documented with theological analysis—show how the void of *Being and Nothingness* became the mirror of the post-Christian psyche.

Sayles traces the first line of descent through Simone de Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* (1949) translated Sartre’s ontology into gender theory. Beauvoir’s famous statement—“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”—is read by Sayles as existentialism turned social. Gender, once regarded as given, becomes project; essence dissolves into performance. Sayles does not caricature Beauvoir’s achievement; he acknowledges the emancipatory impulse of her work, especially its protest against oppressive essentialisms. Yet he insists that, cut loose from transcendence, the logic of becoming must eventually consume itself.

The genealogy continues through Judith Butler, for whom gender is not merely chosen but performed, endlessly iterated without origin. Sayles reads Butler’s *Gender Trouble* as the full secularisation of Sartre’s *pour-soi*: the self as perpetual negation, identity as theatrical improvisation. What began as metaphysical atheism becomes, in cultural form, ontological fluidity. Sayles’s response is not moralistic but structural: where no Creator endows essence, identity must oscillate without rest. The freedom of reinvention becomes the burden of self-maintenance.

The second branch of Sartre’s legacy leads to Foucault and Derrida, whom Sayles calls “the metaphysicians of suspicion.” Both inherit Sartre’s distrust of fixed essences but replace individual choice with impersonal systems. In Foucault, power replaces freedom; in Derrida, deferral replaces meaning. Sayles reads this as the natural progression of autonomy’s entropy: once freedom is detached from divine order, it dissolves first into power and then into play.

Within this lineage, *Without Excuse* functions as counter-genealogy. Sayles re-anchors critique itself in revelation: language, power, and history remain intelligible only because they participate in the Logos. His Logos-centred metaphysic restores the very stability that postmodernism denies. Where Derrida sees only endless différance, Sayles sees patterned inscription within the IΔF; where Foucault sees discursive construction, Sayles sees providential ordering. Thus, the Reformed doctrine of

providence becomes a metaphysical antidote to the anxiety of interpretation.

Sayles extends the genealogy further, connecting existential freedom to the modern cult of authenticity. Through Rollo May and Irvin Yalom, Sartre's ideas entered existential psychotherapy, where the patient is urged to "create meaning" in the absence of transcendence. From there they filtered into self-help slogans—"live your truth," "you do you"—and into the performative ethos of the digital self. Sayles observes that such therapeutic optimism masks ontological despair: the insistence that meaning can be constructed conceals the fear that none exists.

His critique, though theological, engages the psychology of late modernity. The "authentic self," he argues, is Sartre's *pour-soi* domesticated for consumer culture: freedom rebranded as lifestyle. Yet this continual self-curation produces exhaustion. By contrast, Sayles's Second Shamay anthropology offers what might be called a theology of rest. The self need not manufacture significance; it receives it through authorship. Psychological peace, he suggests, depends not on autonomy but on recognition—the rediscovery of one's identity as inscription within divine information.

In one of the book's most vivid analyses, Sayles tracks Sartrean existentialism through modern popular music. From the jazz improvisations Sartre admired in post-war Paris to the self-reinventions of David Bowie and Madonna, he finds variations on the same theme: identity as project, performance as ontology. Bowie's confession—"I always had a repulsive need to be something more than human"—is cited as the secular echo of Sartre's *ens causa sui* fantasy, man striving to be both finite and infinite.

Sayles does not dismiss artistic experimentation; indeed, he reads its restlessness as a misdirected spiritual hunger. The creative drive testifies, albeit unconsciously, to the Logos's imprint. In his counter-vision, the true artist does not invent reality but unveils its order. The improvisation of jazz, when reinterpreted theologically, becomes emblematic of freedom within providence: structured spontaneity, liberty sustained by form. Thus, the aesthetic domain becomes another theatre where the Logos answers existentialism—not by silence, but by harmony.

Sayles's genealogy culminates in the twenty-first-century digital world. Here, he argues, Sartre's ontology achieves technological embodiment. Social-media platforms transform the *pour-soi* into algorithmic spectacle: selfhood continually projected, edited, and consumed. The screen becomes the mirror of nothingness, reflecting back images without

substance. Sayles interprets this as the “cybernetic sacrament of autonomy”—a ritual repetition of Sartre’s creed that man must create himself endlessly.

Yet even this technological narcissism is not beyond redemption. Sayles’s IΔF theology suggests that information itself is a medium of grace. The same networks that perpetuate fragmentation can also bear witness to order. Communication, rightly understood, is communion. By recovering the Logos as the ground of information, Sayles reclaims the digital sphere as potential locus of revelation: not the denial of meaning, but its dissemination. His critique of Sartre thus extends into a theology of media, envisioning information not as void but as vocation.

The cultural analyses of *Without Excuse* are not nostalgic appeals to lost Christendom; they are strategic interventions. Sayles’s series title, *Veritas Contra Mundum*—Truth Against the World—summarises his intent. He does not seek the return of metaphysical consensus but the exposure of false autonomy wherever it appears. Sartre’s heirs, whether philosophers, activists, or artists, all share one presupposition: the self as source. Sayles confronts this presupposition with an alternative anthropology in which the self is image and echo.

The Logos-centred vision re-introduces transcendence not as external authority but as the immanent grammar of being. It does not suppress freedom; it orders it. In cultural terms, Sayles offers a counter-narrative to the mythology of self-construction: meaning is not produced by rebellion but discovered through reverence. The true revolution, he suggests, is not existential defiance but metaphysical recognition.

From an academic standpoint, Sayles’s cultural critique stands at the intersection of theology, philosophy, and cultural studies. It demonstrates awareness of feminist theory, post-structuralism, and contemporary media analysis, yet re-interprets each through a Reformed metaphysic. Some scholars may find his genealogical method too sweeping, connecting disparate phenomena under the banner of existential autonomy. Nevertheless, the coherence of his framework—the consistent tracing of “autonomy without God” to its social consequences—gives the argument cumulative force.

Sayles’s achievement lies in his refusal to isolate theology from culture. For him, the Logos is not confined to church or creed but extends into the structures of art, politics, and communication. In this respect, *Without Excuse* revives the integrative vision of earlier Christian humanists—from Augustine to Schaeffer—who saw no domain exempt from the rule of the Word. The result is a cultural theology that functions simultaneously as

critique and invitation: critique of the idol of self-creation, invitation to rediscover meaning as participation in the eternal speech of God.

The genealogical section of *Without Excuse* broadens the work from philosophical engagement to civilisational diagnosis. Sartre's existential anthropology, Sayles argues, has become the operating system of modernity; its symptoms are visible in every sphere of contemporary life. Against this inheritance, he proposes the Logos-centred alternative: identity as authored, freedom as participation, information as revelation.

From a neutral academic perspective, the analysis exemplifies how theological metaphysics can function as cultural criticism without abandoning intellectual rigour. Sayles's tone is prophetic but not reactionary; his method is presuppositional yet historically informed. Whether one agrees with his Logos-centred ontology or not, *Without Excuse* stands as a rare attempt to treat Sartre not only as a philosopher but as the progenitor of an age—and to answer him with a system that is at once metaphysical, moral, and cultural.

Valuation and Implications

In the closing analysis, *Without Excuse* stands as part of a wider intellectual retrieval movement: the effort to recover classical Christian metaphysics within a post-existential world. Sayles's work belongs beside the resurgent conversations of analytic theology, Radical Orthodoxy, and post-liberal hermeneutics, yet it maintains a distinct Reformed accent. His procedure is presuppositional rather than dialectical, and his aim is not dialogue for its own sake but the re-assertion of divine authorship as the condition of intelligibility.

Sayles retrieves what existentialism discarded: the Creator–creature distinction, the coherence of providence, and the Trinitarian structure of reality. But he does so through phenomenological attentiveness rather than scholastic abstraction. The fusion of Van Til's antithesis with Husserlian description gives his project an unusual texture—both confessional and phenomenological. The result is neither scholastic system-building nor apologetic polemic, but what might be called *Reformed phenomenological metaphysics*: a disciplined attempt to view consciousness, culture, and cosmos through the light of the Logos.

Academically, *Without Excuse* deserves attention for the seriousness with which it engages Sartre on his own terrain. Sayles refuses the easy dismissal of existentialism as mere atheistic despair. He recognises in Sartre a genuine struggle with the metaphysical consequences of God's absence and treats that struggle with respect. The book's critique is

strongest where it demonstrates that Sartre's categories—freedom, responsibility, authenticity—require a stability they cannot generate.

In doing so, Sayles revives the classical Christian conviction that unbelief is not irrational but parasitic: it lives on the intellectual capital of faith while denying its source. His argument that Sartre's ethics of autonomy secretly presupposes the Logos mirrors Van Til's notion of "borrowed capital," but is restated here in phenomenological idiom. Where Van Til spoke of presuppositions, Sayles speaks of informational fields; where Sartre saw negation, Sayles sees participation. The continuity between apologetics and ontology marks the book's philosophical sophistication.

Sayles's integration of information theory with theological cosmology constitutes one of his most original contributions. By conceiving the created order as an informational field sustained by the divine Word, he translates the traditional doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and providence into categories conversant with contemporary physics and digital epistemology. The IΔF functions as a metaphysical grammar through which theology and science may converse without reductionism.

In academic terms, this positions Sayles among thinkers such as Thomas F. Torrance, John Polkinghorne, and William Dembski, who have attempted to articulate a scientifically credible doctrine of creation. Yet his approach remains uniquely Reformed: divine sovereignty is never compromised by the autonomy of natural process. The IΔF is not an emergent field but the continuous speech of the Logos. Thus, *Without Excuse* contributes to the theology-science dialogue not by softening orthodoxy but by deepening its metaphysical articulation.

At the anthropological level, Sayles's doctrine of the Second Shamay provides a coherent framework for integrating consciousness, morality, and eschatology. By grounding personhood in the informational authorship of God, he restores the dignity of the human soul without lapsing into dualism. The self is neither material accident nor self-generated fiction; it is authored information awaiting resurrection.

Ethically, this framework offers a metaphysical grounding for moral realism. If the moral law is the Logos's pattern inscribed in the field of being, then morality is as objective as gravity. Freedom, therefore, is the joyful conformity of finite agency to that pattern. In the context of Sartrean despair and postmodern relativism, such moral ontology represents a deliberate counter-proposal. It recalls Calvin's axiom that "true knowledge of God and of ourselves are inseparable." Sayles's anthropology translates that axiom into the language of informational

ontology, offering a renewed foundation for moral responsibility in an age of relativism.

From a broader humanities perspective, *Without Excuse* also exemplifies a theological mode of cultural criticism. Its analyses of feminism, postmodern theory, and digital media are not peripheral but essential to the argument: they demonstrate how metaphysical premises shape civilisations. The claim that “existence precedes essence” has produced social forms that mirror its logic—fluid identity, expressive individualism, and performative authenticity. Sayles’s cultural essays trace these developments without polemic, using them as case studies in the exhaustion of autonomy.

At the same time, his vision of the Logos as informational order enables a positive theology of media. Technology becomes the stage upon which humanity’s longing for omnipresence and omniscience plays out in parody. Yet, for Sayles, even the digital mirror testifies to its prototype: the omniscient Logos whose authorship sustains the network of being. This redemptive hermeneutic exemplifies what he elsewhere calls “reading the world as text”—a theological semiotics that invites the academy to interpret culture sacramentally rather than cynically.

From a neutral scholarly standpoint, *Without Excuse* combines unusual methodological strengths with certain speculative risks. Its strengths lie in synthesis, coherence, and conceptual innovation. Few works manage to integrate Calvin, Van Til, Sartre, and information theory into a single argumentative arc without collapsing into eclecticism. Sayles’s prose, while densely theological, retains clarity of structure and consistent internal logic. His ability to translate doctrinal truths into metaphysical and cultural categories makes the work accessible across disciplines.

The risks arise from the same ambition. The use of informational metaphors to describe divine action invites questions of analogy and precision: how literally can “information” bear theological weight? Similarly, the doctrine of the Second Shamay, though rich in symbolic power, may challenge traditional dualisms of body and soul. Academic readers sympathetic to Sayles’s aims may still wish for further technical articulation of how informational ontology interfaces with classical substance metaphysics. Yet such questions mark the frontier of constructive theology rather than its failure.

Within the Reformed intellectual tradition, Sayles stands in continuity with Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer but extends their vision into a more comprehensive metaphysical idiom. Van Til established the presuppositional critique; Schaeffer popularised its cultural implications;

Sayles renders both metaphysically systematic. His Logos-centred ontology may be seen as a twenty-first-century elaboration of the Reformation principle that *soli Deo gloria* encompasses all reality.

Theologically, Sayles's emphasis on the Logos as the ground of information parallels Calvin's insistence on the divine *Verbum* as both creative and redemptive Word. Philosophically, his engagement with Sartre situates him as a counter-existentialist whose purpose is not rejection but redemption of phenomenology. In this sense, Sayles extends the Reformed tradition into direct conversation with continental philosophy, something relatively rare since the seventeenth century.

The implications of *Without Excuse* extend beyond its critique of Sartre. By constructing a Logos-centred metaphysic that integrates theology, philosophy, and culture, Sayles opens new research trajectories. In theology, his informational ontology invites reconsideration of doctrines of creation and providence in light of quantum and digital paradigms. In philosophy, it suggests that phenomenology can be reconciled with theism through a theory of inscription rather than projection. In ethics and psychology, it proposes a framework for moral and mental coherence grounded in divine authorship rather than self-assertion.

For interdisciplinary studies, Sayles's model offers a bridge between the humanities and the sciences. The concept of the IΔF translates the theological affirmation of meaning into a form comprehensible to information theory, systems science, and cognitive research. Whether or not future scholars adopt his specific terminology, the methodological example—a confident integration of revelation and reason—may prove enduring.

Finally, any balanced evaluation must acknowledge the tone and temper of Sayles's project. *Without Excuse* is neither detached speculation nor devotional apologetic. It is animated by conviction, yet composed with academic restraint. The title itself—borrowed from Romans 1:20—signals the union of intellectual argument and moral seriousness. Sayles writes as one who believes that ideas are accountable to truth, and that philosophy, like theology, is a form of worship.

In this respect, his book belongs to the tradition of thinkers who understood thought as obedience: Augustine, Calvin, Edwards, and more recently, Cornelius Van Til. The aim is not to win debates but to re-orient perception—to remind a culture intoxicated by autonomy that all freedom derives from dependence, all knowledge from revelation, all being from the Word. As such, *Without Excuse* functions as both critique and confession, both philosophical system and doxological act.

Viewed in its totality, *Without Excuse: Contending Sartre* may be regarded as a significant contribution to contemporary philosophical theology. It exemplifies how Reformed thought, far from retreating into sectarian isolation, can enter the highest intellectual arenas of modernity with conceptual confidence and creative precision. Its dialogue with Sartre exposes the exhaustion of autonomy while unveiling the coherence of the Logos. Its synthesis of information theory and theology anticipates a renewed metaphysical vocabulary for the age of data and digital mediation.

From a neutral academic standpoint, the enduring value of the work lies in its demonstration that theology remains a living discipline capable of interpreting and transforming modern philosophy. Sayles's Logos-centred vision challenges both secular and religious readers to reconsider the foundation of freedom, consciousness, and meaning. Whether one accepts his metaphysical conclusions or not, *Without Excuse* stands as evidence that the conversation between Athens and Jerusalem, between Sartre's café and Calvin's Geneva, is far from over. It may even be, as Sayles intimates, the only conversation that can save modern man from himself.

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